

# Otto's Tales



*Let's Meet*

*a* **BAKER**

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**BEEP! BEEP!** Smidge jumped up and ran to the oven in the Prager family kitchen. “The cookies are done!” The kitten pulled on her oven mitts and grasped the hot tray to remove the treats.



Dennis and Otto's hopeful smiles quickly faded when they saw the flat, hard blobs on the baking sheet.



“**Ruff Ruff!** Not again!” Otto barked.

Dennis looked at all the other **batches** of cookies on the counter. “How could *all* of these turn out bad? We must have made a mistake somewhere.”

Otto sniffed the trays. “Can we just cover them with lots of yummy frosting?”

His best friend started to worry. “My school’s bake sale is tomorrow. There’s no way I can sell these sad, flat cookies.”





“Tomorrow?! This is taking too long.” Smidge grew impatient. “Can’t we just buy cookies from the store?”

Dennis shook his head. “No, it has to be homemade. I think we should find someone who can help and knows more about baking than we do.”

“Who?” Otto asked.

“A **baker!**” Dennis exclaimed.

“The bakery here in town makes fresh treats like this every day. I’ll go give them a call.”

“Being a baker sounds like a fun job,” Smidge pointed out.

“And a hard job too!” Otto gestured to the messy kitchen.

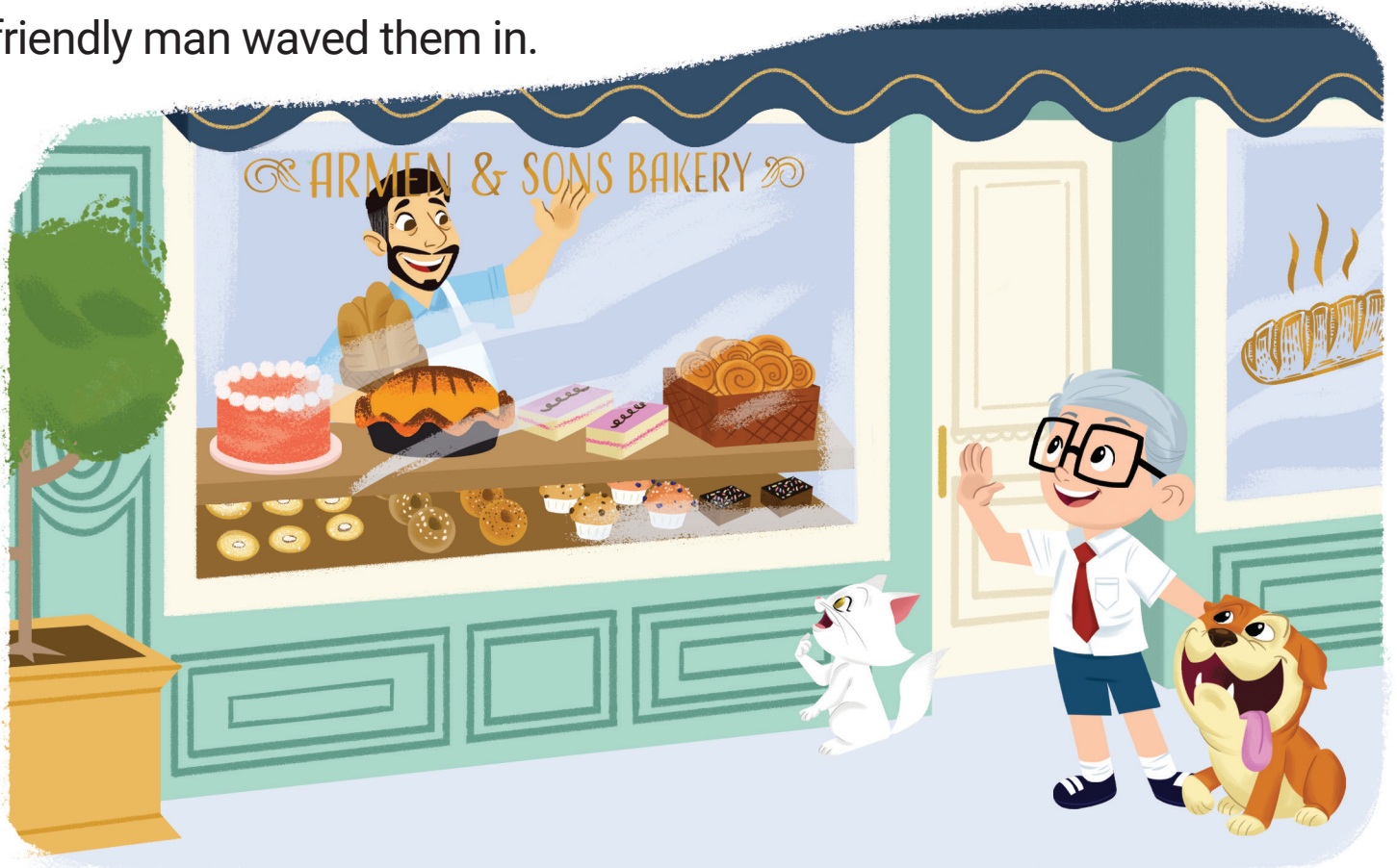
“Good news!” Dennis announced. “The baker can help us with the cookies tomorrow. The bad news is...we have to get there at five in the morning.”

“Do we have to?” Smidge complained. “I don’t like getting up early.”

“It’s important,” Dennis reminded her, “and we have to get it done *before* school.”



The next morning, with the sky still dark, the friends walked to the bakery. The streets were empty, but the shop was already lit up inside. A friendly man waved them in.



“Good morning, friends,” the baker greeted. “Welcome to Armen & Sons Bakery. You can call me Mr. Armen. My son is in the back preparing everything before our customers arrive.”

“I’m Dennis, and this is Otto and Smidge. Thank you for helping us before school starts. This is our last chance to get the cookies right for the bake sale.”





“Of course! Let me show you to my kitchen.” Mr. Armen smiled.

“Do you always start work this early?” Smidge asked, still half-asleep.

“I sure do,” the baker replied.

“Customers expect freshly baked goods in the morning, which take time to prepare. It’s not easy to wake up so early. It requires going to bed on time

and showing up to work even if it’s cold or rainy outside.”

“That’s discipline!” Dennis admired the baker.



“Yes,” Mr. Armen agreed, “and an important ingredient for getting things done!” He grabbed a hat and apron from a set of hooks on the wall. “In my kitchen, we have a uniform. Each of you grab a **baker’s cap** and apron! We need to stay clean while we work.”



“Dad!” A younger man, who looked just like Mr. Armen, joined them. “Everything is ready for our guests.”

“I can always count on you to get things done.” Mr. Armen grinned. “This is my son, Ara, and he’ll get you set up at your stations. Let’s bake some cookies!”



Otto watched Ara carefully.  
“Did you always want to be a baker like your dad?”

“Oh yes.” Ara looked at his father. “This business has been in our family for a long time.”

“My father started this bakery when our family first moved from Armenia to the United States,” Mr. Armen shared. “He was excited about the freedom and opportunities America offered, so he followed his dreams of owning a business. Our family loves to share our Armenian culture through our bakery, but we’ve also learned to blend our traditional recipes with American ones. You’ll find a variety of sweets in our shop!”



“Wow, that’s cool!” The aroma of sugar filled the kitchen. Dennis admired some unique pastries baking in the oven. “Most of my friends are making regular cookies or brownies for the bake sale. I was going to make the same too, but maybe you can teach us a recipe from your country?”



Mr. Armen patted Dennis on the back. “I’d be happy to—in fact, I have the perfect one from my great-grandmother. She called it

**Shakarshee**: a delicious, sweet, and buttery cookie that melts in your mouth as soon as you take a bite. Great-grandma’s secret is extra powdered sugar on top!”

Smidge’s ears perked up. “Yum! How do we start?”



“We start with the right tools and ingredients,” the baker announced. “For tools, you need **measuring cups**, a bowl, a **spatula**, a **mixer**, a **cookie scoop**, and a baking sheet. Raise your spatulas when you are ready for the next step.”

The trio popped their spatulas in the air.

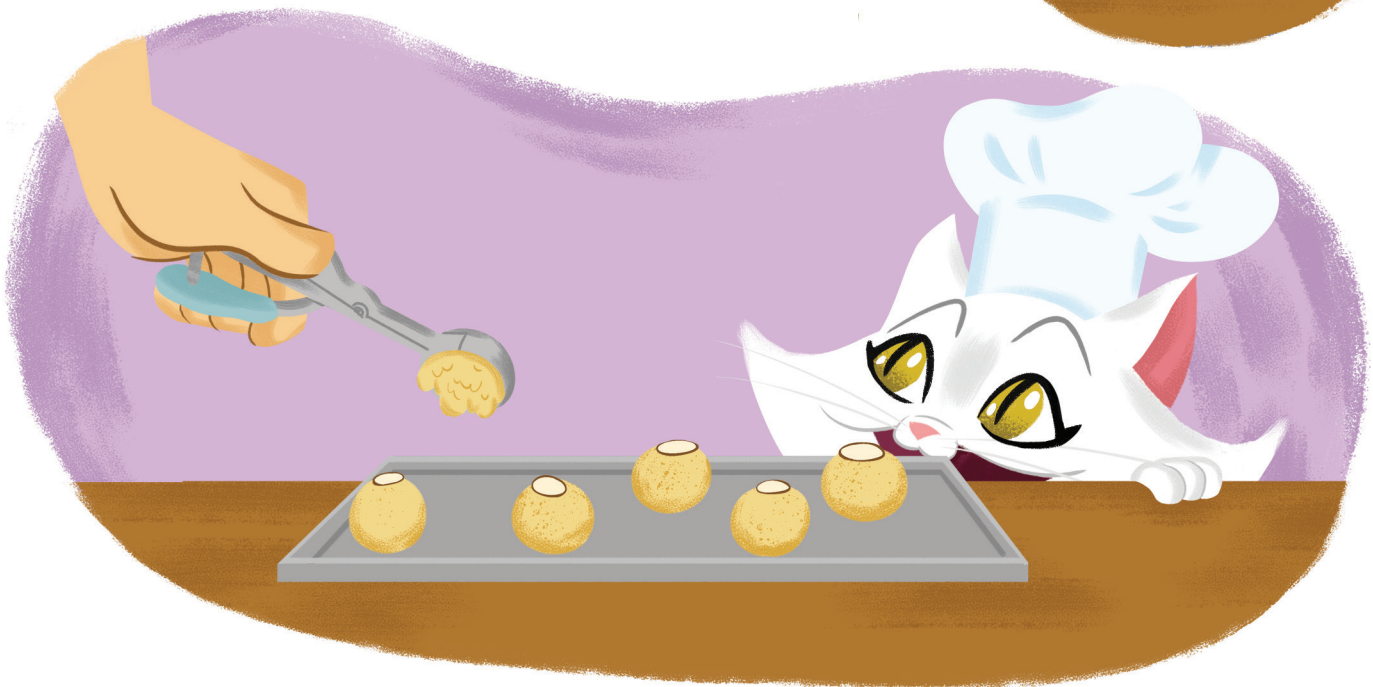


“Excellent. Now, we only need a few ingredients: butter, powdered sugar, eggs, and flour,” the baker continued. “Ara and I will help you mix everything correctly.”





The baker and his son moved between the friends, patiently showing each of them how to properly measure using the cups, how to mix the **batter**, when to scrape the sides of the bowl, and how to spoon the right amount of **dough** with the scoop.



When Smidge's baking sheet was about halfway full with little balls of dough, she was nowhere to be found.

"Where's your fluffy friend?" the baker asked Dennis and Otto.

**BANG! CRASH!** Containers and boxes spilled from the shelves to the floor—the kitten rolling down with them.





“Found her!” Ara rushed over to clean up the mess. “What were you doing?”

“Mr. Armen said extra powdered sugar! I just wanted more for my batch,” Smidge explained.

Ara showed the kitten back to her station. “You jumped ahead a little. The extra sugar comes at the end.”

Mr. Armen joined them. “My son is right. Being a disciplined baker requires following the recipe and having patience. We do it one step at a time.”

Otto and Dennis gave the kitten a questioning look. “Did you follow the recipe with discipline at home, Smidge?”



Her eyes widened, embarrassed.

“It was taking too long, and there were so many instructions. I got bored, so I decided to do it my way.”





Mr. Armen patted Smidge's head. "Baking is an art. It is creative and fun, but it's also a science. That means it requires precise measurements and following instructions too."

"Oh," Smidge replied. "I didn't think about it like that. I'll pay closer attention." The kitten grabbed her bowl and finished scooping her dough onto the baking sheet.

"Now, into the oven!" Mr. Armen helped the friends slide their pans onto the hot racks.

"I can't wait to taste these!" Otto's tail wagged.

**BEEP! BEEP!** When the timer rang, Otto, Smidge, and Dennis marveled at the golden, perfectly round cookies that Mr. Armen pulled from the oven.

"Those smell delicious." Otto's tongue was hanging from his mouth.





“Once these cool down, we can have some fun,” Mr. Armen revealed. “As a baker, I am always looking for ways to make my goods more appealing to my customers. I need to stand out from the competition, so people will be excited to buy my cookies.”

Dennis understood. “What do you do to make your cookies extra special?”

“I decorate them!” he exclaimed. “Let’s see how creative you three can be! We have sugar, frosting, *and* red, white, and blue sprinkles.”

Smidge jumped up. “I call the sprinkles!” Then, after pondering a moment, she asked, “Could someone help me make mine look like American flags?”

“If you can be patient for just a minute, I’ll be right there,” the baker replied with a wink.



Once the cookies were complete, Mr. Armen helped them place the baked goods into boxes.

“Just in time!” Otto cheered. “School starts in half an hour.”

Dennis paused. “Do you think this will be enough for my bake sale? A lot of people will be there, and we’re trying to raise enough money to fix our old cafeteria.”



“I see,” Mr. Armen said. “Tell you what—I’ll send you with an extra **baker’s dozen**. I love supporting our local schools.”

Ara brought over another box of cookies. Otto counted them all. “A dozen is 12, but there are 13 cookies in here.”





“Ahh, a baker’s dozen always includes one extra,” Mr. Armen explained. “Some say this practice started when, hundreds of years ago, there used to be rules about how much baked goods should weigh. Bakers didn’t want to be punished if their goods didn’t meet the size requirements, so they would provide an extra one just in case.”

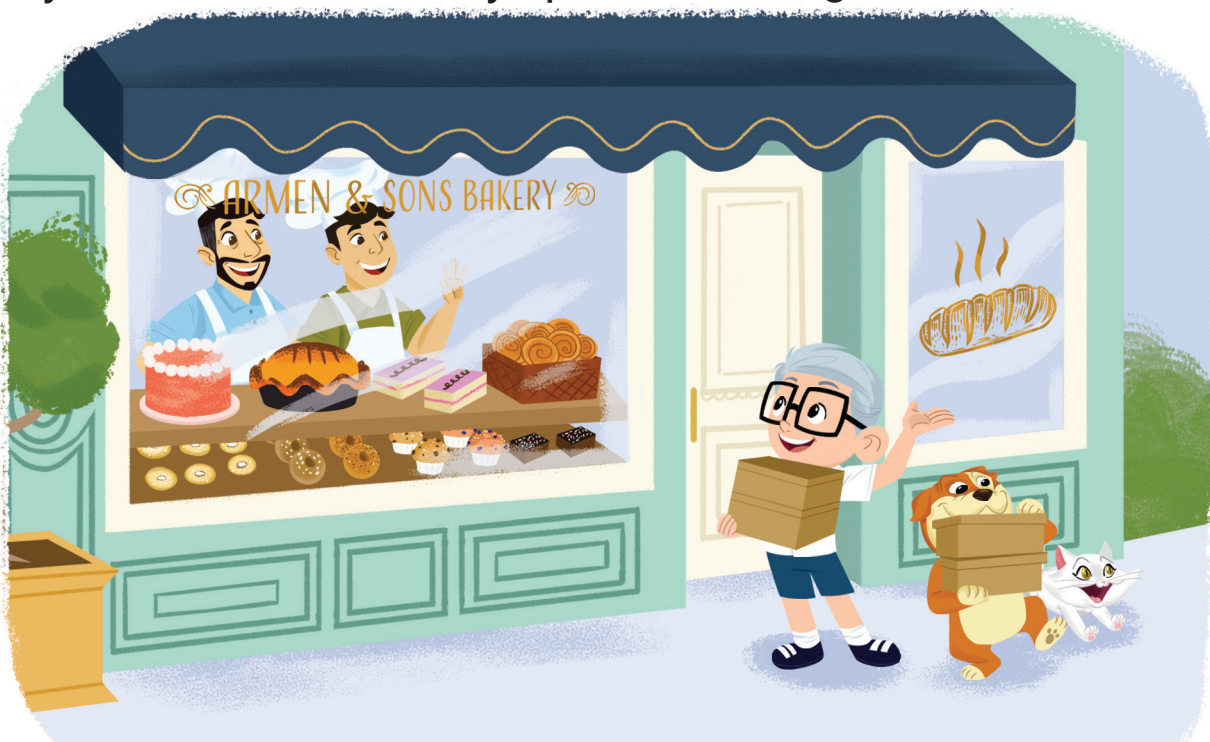
“That’s generous!” Dennis had never heard of that before. “Thanks for your help and the extra cookies!”

“My pleasure.” Mr. Armen winked. “Ara and I are always happy to give back to the community.”

“We should get going to set up your table, Dennis,” Otto reminded them.

“Good luck!” The baker and his son waved goodbye as the friends carried their boxes out of the bakery.

“Hey look, the sun is finally up!” Dennis laughed.





The friends arranged their cookies on a table and waited. After standing for so long, Smidge got bored.

“I want to go play...” the kitten whined.

“Remember, we have to be disciplined to succeed,” Otto emphasized.

“Well, no one is coming to our table.”

“Mr. Armen said we have to stand out from the competition,” Dennis said. “Any ideas?”

“Is there a music classroom around here?” Smidge asked.

Dennis pointed to a nearby hallway.

A few minutes later, the kitten returned with a small speaker. “Let’s play some jams!”





A student approached their table. “Hi Dennis, fun music! What are these cookies?”

“Hey, Francisco!” Dennis greeted. “I made Armenian sugar cookies with the help of my friends and our local baker.”

“Neat,” Francisco replied. “I’ll buy one.” He handed them some coins.



“My family is from Mexico. I’ve never had Armenian cookies before, but they look similar to the Mexican wedding cookies my mom makes.”

“I’d love to try those sometime,” Dennis commented. “It’s exciting to try new things and even blend them together. That’s what America is all about!”



Before they knew it, a line formed at their table. Their cookies were a big hit!



“Wow, we’re almost sold out! This is my favorite adventure yet!”

Otto grinned.

“You say that every time, Otto,” Smidge replied.

“After this, we should write a thank you letter to Mr. Armen and Ara for helping us with our baking skills and teaching us to be disciplined,” Dennis suggested.

“Yeah! But first, I need a nap,” Smidge yawned. “I am *not* an early riser!”

“You *batter* go to bed then.” The boy winked.

“**Ruff Ruff!**”







*Let's Meet*

*a* **BAKER**



# We Love Our Community

**Batch:** An amount of something made at one time.

**Baker:** A person who makes and sells bread, cakes, and other baked goods.

**Baker's Cap:** A short, flat-topped cap worn in bakery settings. It is a type of chef's hat usually made of cotton that is lightweight and washable. These caps are meant to keep hair out of food while baking and absorb sweat while working.

**Shakarshee:** A traditional cookie originating from the country of Armenia. It is very similar to a sugar cookie and has a sweet, buttery taste.

**Measuring Cups:** A set of cups used in baking or cooking marked with measurements (such as  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup,  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup, and 1 cup) that allow one to properly measure out ingredients in a recipe.

**Spatula:** A kitchen tool with a flat, often bendable end used for flipping, lifting, mixing, and spreading in baking.

**Mixer:** A kitchen tool used for blending ingredients together. There are different types, such as a stand mixer or hand mixer, which use rotating or spinning attachments to blend at a faster speed.

**Cookie Scoop:** A handheld tool that looks like a small ice cream scooper. It allows bakers to precisely measure dough and create consistent and even products.

**Batter:** A semi-liquid mixture of ingredients during baking. It is often a combination of flour, eggs, milk, butter, sugar, and leavening agents, though it varies depending on the recipe.

**Dough:** A thick, malleable mixture of ingredients during baking prior to putting it in the oven. The dough can be manipulated and shaped, which is often the case for breads, cookies, and other pastries.

**Baker's Dozen:** A set of 13. This tradition stems from medieval times when bakers were penalized for delivering baked goods that were underweight or too small. An extra item was added to make up for any lack in the rest of the 12.



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**See you in  
our *next* adventure!**

- Dennis, Otto,  
*and* Smidge

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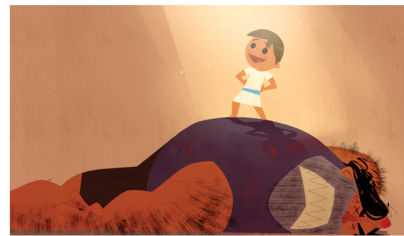
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